The New Book That Interested Me Most

Special Cable Despatch to THE SUN.

LONDON, April 3.—Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Rebecca West, John Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett return definite answers to THE SUN's inquiry as to the most interesting new book they have read in the past twelvemonth, the most interesting new writer they have come upon or their perception of a new note in English literature.

Joseph Conrad does not venture a personal opinion on recent writing. Bernard Shaw's reply seizes upon the words "note" and "writing" in THE SUN'S question to make a reply that is typically Shavian—jesting with an undercurrent of grim earnest.

Rebecca West, whose own novel has attracted so much attention on both sides of the Atlantic and is the year's choice of H. G. Wells, calls attention to the work of another woman in terms of unrestrained admiration.

John Galsworthy restricts his choice to American books and selects a novel by Joseph Hergesheimer.

Arnold Bennett emphasizes the year's poetry and remarks on the fact that the great novel of the war has "of course" not yet appeared.

The answers to THE SUN'S inquiry are given below:

By Bernard Shaw.

"The most interesting new writer of the past twelve months has been Sir Douglas Haig. President Wilson is an old hand."

By H. G. Wells.

"The most interesting new thing I have seen in a long time has been Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*, appearing in the *Century Magazine*."

By Rebecca West.

"I thought Frank Swinnerton's *Nocturne*, published under another name in America, the most beautiful work of art of the year.

"The year's discovery has been Mary Webb, author of *Gone to Earth*. She is a genius and I shouldn't mind wagering that she is going to be the most distinguished writer of our generation."

By John Galsworthy.

"Of the few American books that it has been my privilege to read Joseph Hergesheimer's *The Three Black Pennys* has been the most interesting."

By Arnold Bennett.

"The most striking things of the last year have been poems. I name with satisfaction Gerald Hodgson, Robert Graves, W. Squire and Siegfried Sassoon.

"The great war novel, of course, hasn't yet arrived."

By Joseph Conrad.

"I read very few of last year's publications and therefore beg to be excused from offering an opinion."

By Booth Tarkington.

NO one can say which is the most interesting new book or who is the most interesting new author, &c., without an ignorance and an impertinence comparable to that of people who declare which stories, novels or plays or pictures are the "best" or the "best six" or the "best 119" in the last year or twelve years or the last sixteen and two-thirds weeks.

One can say what book or story interested *him* most and why, which is information about himself and his opinions, and no information at all about the book or story; therefore I cannot conceive any value for the statement except in the eyes perhaps of some member of his family who may be indulgently fond of him.

I am unable, to my regret, to answer your telegram satisfactorily. If I *could* answer it I should be a monster thousands of years out of my time, I should be incomprehensibly wise.

I cannot even make shift at a half answer. Since 1914 I have read nothing whatever except books and articles bearing directly or indirectly on the war and I have read no fiction, either "war fiction" or other.

By Allan Updegraff.

MY recent book interests, answering your query, have centred on war stuff, particularly on first hand impressions by fighting authors among our allies. Leaving aside *Le Feu* as in a class by itself, two recent books, one by an accomplished French Lieutenant of Infantry, the other by an equally accomplished English-Canadian Lieutenant of Artillery, are typical of the new spirit in writing of this kind. Both reveal a spiritual attitude some time considered Teutonic: that is, they appreciate war as an excellent thing for the soul of man and profitable for their own countries.

American books of the same class, perhaps because of their more superficial view, have not thus far been so much inspired by the glory of the trenches; which is, to date, and naturally, largely a German possession. The "fighting instincts," superlative among certain groups and most Germans, as handled by native impressionists, fall into place in that larger view of the conflict which distance, temperament and President Wilson afford us.

The tendency among leading litterateurs of our allies to idealize physical courage and racial traits finds its natural climax in Lieut. Redier's prophetic vision of France, called the inventor of smokeless powder, the submarine and the airplane, as the world's first military power. Both *Blighty* and *Italy*—the latter by D'Annunzio—have been recommended for the same position, and there are numerous native hints of the coming American world supremacy, material, military and cultural. This fourfold outgrowth of time's most beastly, necessary and heroic business is the "new note" whose appearance in literature interests me most.

By Ernest Poole.

YOU asked me what I have found to be the most interesting new note in reading in the last twelve months—the most interesting new book and the most interesting new author. But as I search my memories I find rather a chaos there. I take it you mean fiction, for fiction interests me most.

In the last twelve months I have read many novels of all kinds and I have read them all 'round the world—not only here but on the North Atlantic, in Norway, in Russia, in Siberia and again on the Pacific. And almost as varied and different as these places where I have been are the books that I have read—so that it is quite hopeless to single out any one.

In this war the real world of earth and sky has immeasurably widened out for me and so has the world of the written page, and in widening it has grown confused. I feel as though countless deep, vital ideas, desires, aims and standards that many of us have long held dear have all been hurled into a furnace these days and that when they come out they will all have been changed. And expression of this will be given in books, some written in the old forms, but others perhaps in forms quite new. I believe it is too soon to expect such books; they will not appear until the war clouds clear away.

As to books in this country—Churchill's *Dwelling Place of Light* has interested me more than any book by a native American, but this of course is of that era long ago, "before the war." It is "back there." With it I should place three books I have read in this country, and it is perhaps significant that all three are by foreign born Americans and are stories of immigrants and their struggles to become Americans. *The Rise of David Levinsky*, by Abraham Cahan, is to me the strongest story written in this country in the last ten years. Another very significant story is *The House of Conrad*, by Elias Tobenkin, and a third is *The Making of an American*, by Ravage. This last strikes me as especially interesting in the latter half, where, after having lived for years with the radical foreigners on the lower East Side, the hero decides to see America as it really is and goes out to a medical school in the University of Missouri. His struggle in that atmosphere strikes me as a wonderful experience. These three stories I should think especially valuable for American readers now in these days when the war has showed us that we would do well to try to draw closer to each other, no matter in what country each one of us happened to have been born.

Of the English novels I like best *The Green Mirror*, by Hugh Walpole, who seems to me to be making rapid strides toward the high places in modern English fiction, and *Sonia; or, Between Two Worlds*, by McKenna.

By all odds the most significant book I have read in the last year is *Under Fire*. That seems to tower above all war stories that have yet been written. And still I feel that the greatest stories of the war will not be written in this vein. For *Under Fire* is what I call an external sort of book. Though the author shows again and again that if he cares to he can give the most terribly revealing glimpses into the soul of a man, this does not seem to interest him. He seems to keep showing us masses, masses. He shows us trench life from the outside. I think that a greater novel will be written by an author who will say "the most significant thing of the war is the story of its effect on one man's mind and spirit," and I shall be very greatly surprised if some one of the Russian writers—perhaps one we have never heard of yet—does not write this book for which I am waiting.

By Henry B. Fuller.

IN the way of a novel the most interesting book, to me, is the one that accomplishes a good deal within narrow limits, the one that can be grasped as a compact, self-contained organism within the space of an evening's reading. Such a book promotes a sense of form—a sense rather needed in the literature of English speaking peoples, and it demonstrates a concentration which is one of the finest manifestations of energy. Such a book is Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*, an expeditious affair of six chapters in 185 pages.

This book meets the above points, and it meets some others. It is timely, if not actually a war book, still a book that only the world's recent experiences and present circumstances make possible. Also it bears interestingly the traces of the hand of the radical rushing young feminist. It brings sharply to book, too, the somewhat objurgated type known as the "lady," and it adumbrates possibly an immediate future when social snobbery among us Anglo-Saxons may be mitigated and when an essential womanliness, even if not made manifest in fashion, may be more generously recognized. Miss West, besides, is strong on vignettes, both social and scenic, and possesses a style rich and vital enough to make them effective.

By Elias Tobenkin.

I CANNOT think of a single book in the last twelve months that impressed me so deeply as did Martin Anderson Nexö's novel *Pelle the Conqueror*—this despite the fact that ordinarily I am not a trilogy enthusiast, and *Pelle* is a trilogy improperly divided. Its fourth volume, in my opinion, should have been condensed by the author to about one-fourth its present length and should have been made the last part of the third volume.

Pelle the Conqueror is a mass rather than individual story. Through "Pelle's" eyes, through "Pelle's" experiences not only the working class of Denmark but the entire civilization of that country comes to the surface. And to paint and frame the civilization of one's country so that the whole world can gaze at it, feel and understand it, is a great distinction.

The war now devastating half of the world has brought out one thing clearly: The civilization of the world will in the future be consciously determined by the laboring masses, the spokesmen of these masses. It is time, therefore, these laboring masses began to be understood. The world is astonished when a man like Trotzky, a son of the plain people, suddenly becomes the most powerful figure in Russia. Yet there is nothing extraordinary in the rise of a Trotzky. The common people in Russia have risen and it was quite natural for them to put one of their own kind into power.

The world's amazement comes from the fact that it had not been properly informed about the masses—their rise everywhere, their aspirations everywhere. Fiction to-day is still being written all too frequently about clever people doing clever things, just as history in the recent past was written about "great people." But neither such fiction nor such history interprets adequately and truthfully the life from which they spring and the times which they depict. *Pelle the Conqueror* marks an epoch in literature because it is in tune with the democratic mass movements and the democratic psychology which is the keynote of the present day and age.

By Mary Austin.

THE book of this year that interests me so much more than any other that I can easily say that none other is entitled to any place beside it is *The Path on the Rainbow*, an American Indian anthology collected by George Cronyn and published by Boni & Liveright. Just at a time when poetry and all the arts seem to have been cut off as by a sword at the old sources of inspiration it is of peculiar significance.

We Americans have gone on contentedly taking our inspiration from the Old World until there is danger of forgetting that there is a fresh springing fountain on our own sod. To many people it may come as a surprise that there is such a thing as American Indian verse—to all but a very few the quantity and quality will be an amazement. Now when all the world is looking to America for the best expression of world democracy the discovery of new literary forms uncontaminated by European thought is of national importance.

Mr. Cronyn has done his work well, including in the collection specimens from all the tribes, both literal translations and interpretative translations made by people who are familiar with Indian life and thought. There are love songs, cradle songs, songs for beginning and ending a journey, songs of war, death songs and prayer songs about all the things the human heart cares for.

No one who is interested in the American spirit can afford to neglect this anthology, in which the great spaces, hills and deserts of our native land are expressed in the native American manner. It enables us better to bear the loss of European art, under German culture, when we see how easily new art can come out of the new continent.

By Emerson Hough.

WE have in Chicago a Camp Fire Club of big game hunters, a company of gentlemen adventurers trading into all parts of the world. It is a pretty good club—I am president of it!

We have also in Chicago the Society of Midland Authors, writers of the central States, each of whom has had a book printed without paying for it. It is a pretty good society—I know, because I am president of it!

We have likewise in Chicago a remote but hopeful imitation of the Dutch Treat Club of New York, an association of writers and artists known as the White Paper Club. It is a pretty good club—I ought to know, because I am president of it!

To these and to other organizations of which I am not yet president come at times figures of distinction from all over the world—adventurers, authors, artists, thinkers. Which of them all has brought the largest and the newest note, the most distinct message, within the last twelve months?

Of course the Archbishop of York has proved himself the greatest speaker of all that England has sent to us gently to urge us to hasten. He is great because he is simple. But he is not a writer.

The other day there came into the White Paper Club of Chicago an elated publisher who held firmly by the arm, lest he might escape, a rather soggy and shapeless youth who wore the uniform of the United States Navy. Also he wore the Croix de Guerre with Palm. He called it the Croy dee Gare with Pam.

The publisher introduced him as Gunner Depew of the army, navy and almost everything else. He recently had found him on the Lake front, wandering around, discharged from the army and navy and everything else, and broke. He had no relatives and no friends.

That was two weeks ago. I suppose Gunner Depew is perhaps worth $10,000 or more to-day.

Mr. Depew, or Gunner Depew, to give him his title, was of no obvious relationship to Chauncey M. He spoke very badly, entirely without emotion. Perhaps he writes very badly, although his editor may have cared for that—I have not yet read his book. I cannot tell how badly he probably speaks on the lecture platform—of course all war correspondents,